**May 17, 2020 1 Peter 3:13-22**

***Faithful***

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 3:13-22 NRSV

*(13)Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? (14)But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, (15)but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; (16)yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. (17)For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. (18)For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, (19)in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, (20)who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. (21)And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you--not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22)who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

**Notes:**

1. We are to be ***zealous***; for truth and piety, justice, and what is good.
   1. There may be times when we feel ***intimidated*** and ***misunderstood***
   2. Continue speaking out the ***faith*** of Jesus Christ.
   3. Never be ***shy***to share the Gospel with others.
   4. Show ***respect*** to others as we speak to them about Jesus
2. Share the ***Good*** ***News*** of Jesus.
   1. God ***understands*** how hard it is for us
   2. Our goal is ***relationship*** with God the Father.
   3. Jesus died for us so that He might bring us to ***God***.
3. Christ has proclaimed his ***Lordship*** wherever unclean spirits may be.
   1. The resurrection of Jesus announces his Lordship over all creation;
   2. Jesus is ***King*** of ***kings*** and ***Lord*** of ***lords***.
   3. The authority of the resurrected Christ is ***universal*** over all creation.
4. Early Christians faced the possibility of ***persecution***.
   1. Each of us face the possibility of being ***attacked*** and ***misunderstood***.
   2. Are you Prepared? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   3. We must be prepared to ***stand*** ***firm*** in the faith; to give an account for our ***faith***; and, to face hardship and persecution.
   4. When we are ***prepared*** we can be assured that we will be safe and secure in the loving arms of God.

**Transcript:**

What would it take for you to defend something with your life? This seems like an odd question, but then again, a question we must ask ourselves. What would provoke you to defend something with all that you have, even if it meant you would lose your life? If somebody was to attempt to steal your car, would you defend it with all you have? If somebody was to steal your wallet, would you risk death to get it back? If somebody was to make an attempt to defame your character, how would you defend that? What would it take and how far would you go?

I have always viewed myself as a timid child. I would not be an aggressor, I would allow somebody to take from me and would not fight for what was taken. I have shared that my parents were afraid for me; afraid that I would be bullied, that I would allow others to push me around, and so they taught me that it was not ok for me to start fights, but when push comes to shove, I need to defend myself and my beliefs.

We all need to learn to defend what we believe in. If we believe in something so strongly, we must learn to defend the idea and the principle of what our belief is. If not for people being willing to defend their belief of human freedom, the United States would not have ever been formed. And, if not for people being faithful to these beliefs the country would never have prospered. But the people were faithful and the US has prospered. The church is very much the same; if people would not have defended their beliefs and been faithful to these beliefs the church would not have stood for as long as it has. But there is one thing that keeps the church moving forward, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ this alone is a stark reminder of what is important; and that we must stay faithful.

Staying faithful to Christ can be real tough when life gets difficult. Sometimes life throws us a curve ball and we really can’t make sense of the Christian faith in the light of what has happened to us. And sometimes, other people may give us a really hard time for being a Christian: friends, family, work colleagues, our employers may not make it easy for us and the temptation is either to stay quiet about our faith or give up on it altogether.

Peter’s letter gives us some real encouragement if that is how we feel. And he begins in verse 13 by giving hope to believers who are suffering for their faith: “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3:13-22

*1 Peter 3:13-22 NRSV (13)Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? (14)But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, (15)but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; (16)yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. (17)For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. (18)For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, (19)in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, (20)who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. (21)And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you--not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22)who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

The word that Peter uses here for ‘eager’ is a strong word in the Greek: Zealots - zealots for what is good. Of course, zealots have received a bad press over the course of Christian history; a reference to the Pharisees or religious people who have oppressed through their passion. But the word itself is actually a fairly neutral one and we are called to be zealous for the right things rather than the wrong things: zealous for truth and piety, zealous for justice and here, zealous for what is good.

Peter is anxious to encourage his readers as they pursue what is good and true and just, verse 14: “*But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated*”. As Christians, holding fast to our faith in Jesus, there may well be times when we feel intimidated and misunderstood but Peter urges us to hold fast and stand for what we know to be true. Despite the probability of being so misunderstood, as Peter says in verse 15, we are to “*in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord*”.

And not only are we to revere Christ even before those who misunderstand us but also, as he goes on to say, “*always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you*.”

Here is the positive response that is called on us as Christians; that we are to continue speaking out the faith, despite any opposition we might face, to declare Christ to an unbelieving and sometimes hostile world.

Of course, what is unique about our Christian faith, as Peter rightly notes here, is the hope that is ours. We are to speak out boldly about the hope we have as Christians; that God goes with us through our lives and will always be here for us.

We must never be shy to share the Gospel with others. But Peter is absolutely sure that the guiding principle for us in sharing the Gospel must always be respect, love and compassion. So he goes on in verse 16 to say that when we give an account of the hope, we must do so, “*with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear*…” The sense here is that we must show respect to others as we speak to them about Jesus but always remember that we are in the presence of God and accountable to him. Peter says in verse 16, “*Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame*.”

Peter concludes this section with the observation in verse 17 that, “*It is better to suffer for doing good*, *if suffering should be God’s will*, *than to suffer for doing evil*.” In this passage, we are urged to share the Good News of Jesus even when we may be misunderstood, even when we may feel intimidated or fearful of the consequences. It is hard to do that but we know that God understands how hard it is for us because he too has experienced misunderstanding in the person of Jesus Christ and Peter reminds us of that in verse 18: “*For Christ also suffered*…” But Peter is very careful that we mustn’t push the comparison too far, so he says that Christ suffered “*once for all*” and he reminds us that, unlike us, Christ suffered “for sins”: our sins, not his own, because as Peter goes on to say “the righteous for the unrighteous…”

Peter then goes on to make this really important point: “*in order to bring you to God*”. Now this is really important because so many people come to faith and somehow stop at Christ, as if he is the end in itself. In John’s Gospel, Jesus called himself the Gate. Here in Peter, the ‘gate-nature’ of Jesus is made explicit: we go through Jesus to God the Father. Experiencing the fatherhood of God is the end destination; living in relationship with Jesus is not the end destination: our relationship with Jesus is the gate through which we travel to get to the Father. We are said to be joint heirs with Jesus, not with God; our inheritance is from God the father. Our goal is relationship with God the Father.

If we see a relationship with Jesus as being the end result of faith, then we miss the true riches of the Christian faith, which is being adopted as children of our Father God. Peter makes that explicit: Jesus died for us so that he might bring us to God. And, of course, that is not a once and for all act: we are spending a whole lifetime coming to God as we journey through our time on earth and, on the other side of the grave, we will continue journeying into the heart of God for all eternity continuing to move into his glorious presence. And, of course, that has been made possible for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, as Peter points out in verse 18: “He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit”.

And then we come to this fascinating section, verses 19-20: “*In which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water.*” What on earth is going on here? These verses seem so strange and out of place it’s hard to make heads or tails from them. These verses have been interpreted in so many different ways over the centuries

We need to break them down a bit to understand what Peter is saying. And there’s three questions to ask about these verses: First, then, who are these spirits in prison? Well, Peter is clearly influenced in this passage by another Jewish writing. It is called 1 Enoch that didn’t find its way into our Bible. And, in 1 Enoch, ‘the spirits’ are always a reference to unclean spirits. So it is fairly safe to assume that Peter is referring to unclean spirits here. Second, what did Christ proclaim? Given the fact that this is something that happened in the light of the resurrection, it is likely that the proclamation is Jesus announcing his Lordship over all creation; even over the unclean spirits. Thirdly, where did this proclamation take place? Peter uses the phrase, “he went and made a proclamation…”: but where did he go? Well, we shouldn’t make too much out of this phrase because it seems to be a colloquialism; a bit like when we say, “he went and made a fool of himself” or “he went and kicked the ball against the wall” or “he went and ate all the biscuits”. It doesn’t refer to a geographical movement so much as a phrase to determine activity.

So Christ has proclaimed his Lordship wherever unclean spirits may be found. He has violated their sanctuary, the refuge where unclean spirits think they are safe, and has proclaimed his Lordship amongst them. And the idea of this happening in the days of Noah is reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24, where he uses that as an analogy of the present age in which we live. So it seems that Peter has developed a metaphor here. His idea is simply this: the resurrection of Jesus Christ announces his Lordship over all creation; there is nowhere for unclean spirits to take refuge: wherever they seek to evade God, Christ will come to them and pronounce his Lordship over them. This is God’s creation and Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords and it is in that truth that we stand and no amount of suffering or persecution or false accusation can remove us from that truth.

That is our inheritance and is our salvation, as Peter goes on to suggest as he extends the metaphor in verse 21: “*And baptism, which this prefigures, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*.” I don’t think Peter is making too much of the water metaphor here; he doesn’t want us to think of the flood as a sort of precursor to baptism! I think he is just drawing a link in our minds between the ark which saved us from the flood, with the idea that we are saved through the waters of baptism.

Peter concludes his thinking by drawing us back to the authority and Lordship of our resurrected Christ, verse 22: “*who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him*”. Peter reiterates the point here that the authority of the resurrected Christ is universal over all creation. Just as the unclean spirits are subject to his authority, so is every other being in the spiritual and physical realm; angels, authorities and powers.

These early Christians were facing the possibility of persecution. They needed to know that they were safe and secure in their profession of faith and in the hands of an almighty and powerful God. In this passage, Peter gives them the assurance they need; and the assurance we need.

Each of us faces the possibility of being attacked. You may be intimidated, you may be misunderstood as you share the faith with other people. Are you Prepared for this? Are you prepared to face such hardship? Are you prepared to face persecution? In the United States you haven’t faced this very often, but it is getting more prevalent.

Each of us needs to be prepared. We must be prepared to stand firm in the faith. We must be prepared to give an account for our faith. We must be prepared to face hardship and persecution. And when we are prepared, we can be assured that we will be safe and secure in the loving arms of God, safe and secure in the strength of our Saviour, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, who has all power and authority in heaven and on earth; and through whom we gain access to our Father in heaven. This is the good news of the Gospel: and we can stand firm in it.